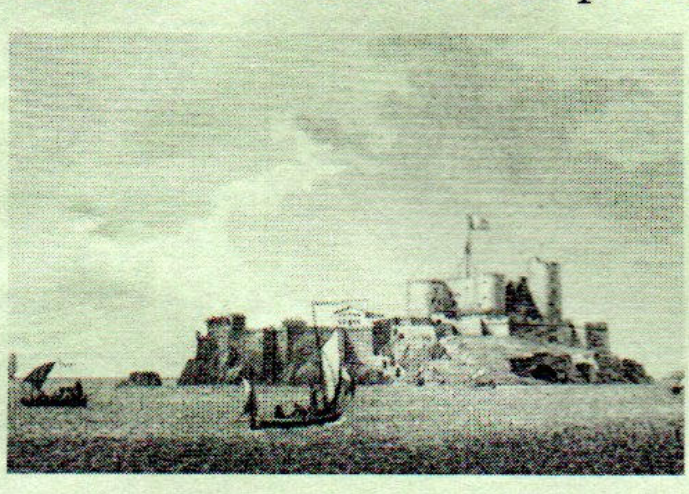
English

Chateau d'If

From fortress to literary legend

A strategic fortress

Built in 1529, on the orders of François I, the Chateau d'If was Marseille's first royal fortress. Its role was to protect one of the kingdom's main trade ports, where the fleet of royal galleys was anchored, and to watch over Marseille, which had been part of France since 1480.

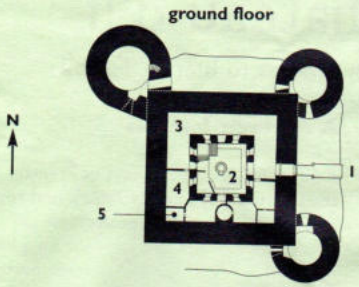


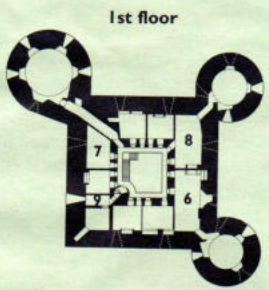
The castle in 1836

In 1591, the city refused to recognise King Henry IV, because he was a Protestant. On the side of the Catholic League, it welcomed the enemy troops of the Duke of Savoy.
The governor of If, who was faithful to the King, had an enclosure built with the help of Florentine troops, thus protecting the entrance to the kingdom from attack. This enclosure was raised by Henry IV's military engineer, Raymond de Bonnefons, in 1604, and again by Vauban in 1701.

A place of legend

It is said that in 1513, a rhinoceros, an animal previously unknown in Europe, given to Pope Leo X by the King of Portugal, made a stopover on the island. In 1844, Alexandre Dumas published *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which was an instant success. In the book, the hero, Edmond Dantès, is imprisoned on the island.
In 1880, the monument was opened to the public.





The construction of If Castle was part of a vast campaign to fortify the coasts and ports of the Kingdom of France in the early 16th century.

Ground floor of the chateau

1 Gate: the only access to the fortress is located in the middle of the east facade. Flanked by two artillery towers and protected by a bartizan*, it has a drawbridge above a dry ditch.
In the chateau entrance, the portcullis prevented assailants from advancing.

2 The inner courtyard housed the kitchens in its south-east corner, the grain store and the rainwater well. On the courtyard walls, built from 'Pierre du Midi' stone, there are a total of 96 pieces of commemorative graffiti, carved by insurgents between June 1848 and April 1849. On the south facade there is the Protestant memorial, inaugurated in 1962.

3 The dungeons were previously used as an armoury, then as barracks. At the back of the gallery, on a Midi stone cornerstone, graffiti dating from the Marseille uprising, based on the model of the 1848 commemorations, can be seen.

4 The cell named after Edmond Dantès, Count of Monte Cristo, occupies the site of the former powder room. There is a hole in the vault leading into the neighbouring dungeon.

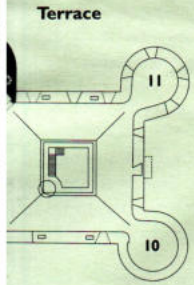
5 The dungeon named after Abbé Faria is fitted with video equipment, enabling visitors to see themselves locked up there.

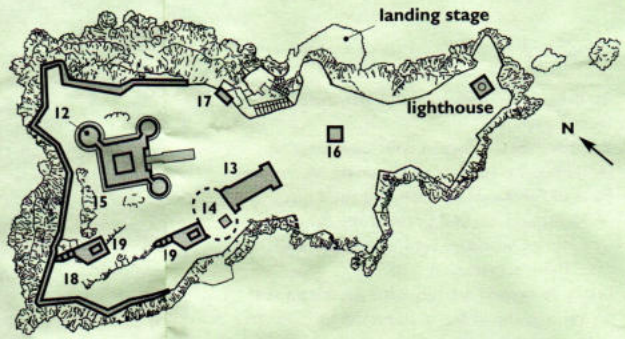
First floor

The first floor casemates, transformed into pistoles*, bear witness to the first efforts to convert the fortress into a prison; the chimneys and murals date back to the 17th and 18th centuries.

6 In the 'Man in the iron mask'* pistole*, the remains of a wooden hoist can be seen: this operated the portcullis on the front gate to the chateau.

7 This cell was attributed to Kléber, assassinated in Cairo in 1800 at the end of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. His body lay here from 1801 to 1818. A display by Bernard Belluc, co-founder of the International Museum of Modest Art in Sète, depicts Kléber's fate.





8 The Count of Mirabeau's cell: he was imprisoned here from 1774 to 1775.

9 A so-called 'death row dungeon' was built into the staircase leading to the terrace.

The terrace

These vast terraced roofs were still used as observation and telemetry posts during the Second World War. The sloped surfaces drained the rainwater off to the cistern in the courtyard.

10 From the Maugouvert Tower, which has a very low parapet, the reefs dotted along the channels in the eastern bay can be seen: Sourdaras and Canoubier to the north-east, and Saint-Estève to the south-west. The two rectangular vents* in the south wall can be seen on the right.

11 Saint-Jaume Tower: the curved parapet was designed to deflect cannon balls. The 20th-century lighthouse can be seen, and beyond it, Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde hill in Marseille, where François I ordered the construction of a bastioned fort* in 1536.

12 The keep or Saint-Christophe Tower is accessible from the terraces via a very large door to enable the artillery to pass through.

On the facade on the left, a hollow column directed the rainwater to the old latrines, which jut out from the south wall of the tower. Inside, the model is a copy of the one ordered by Louis XIV. A spiral staircase leads to the terrace overlooking the entire site from a height of 42 metres. The Midi stone is engraved with various prisoners' inscriptions. To the north, the primitive curved parapets of Saint-Jaume Tower and the two rectangular vents* on the north wall can be seen. To the south, the keep overlooks the extremity of Pomègues and Ratonneau Islands, which also had cannon towers built after 1610 to guard the passage.

The other buildings

Nothing remains of the artillery and powder stores, the commissary and the windmill.

13 The Vauban building was the governor's house.

14 In the enclosed garden, the former kitchen garden, is a 'cabanon' cottage, typical of Provence.

15 The exhibition on the fauna and flora of the Frioul archipelago occupies the ground floor of the Maugouvert Tower, and is only accessible from the outside of the chateau on the south side.

16 The outside cistern supplied the barracks with water.

* *Explanations overleaf.*

Glossary

Bartizan: a small rectangular structure projecting from a façade.
Bastioned fort: a fort in which each section is flanked by another to eliminate blind spots.
Edict of Fontainebleau: revoked the Edict of Nantes which had granted the Protestants freedom of worship, leading to uprisings after their persecution.
Lettre de cachet: a letter with the king's seal containing the order to imprison or exile an individual without trial.
Man in the iron mask: a prisoner of the State during Louis XIV's reign, whose identity, concealed behind an iron mask, remains a mystery.
Pistole: a coin, and by extension, the name of a rented cell.
Vents: openings to evacuate the smoke from artillery fire from the lower casemates.

Practical information

Average length of visit: 45 minutes to 1½ hours, plus 45 minutes for the return crossing.
Guided tours in French
Adapted tours for visually impaired visitors.

Bookshop-Giftshop
The guide to this monument is available in the 'Itinéraires' collection in 2 different languages, in the bookshop-giftshop.

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CENTRE DES MONUMENTS NATIONAUX

The enclosure

The enclosure, built 60 years after the chateau, most probably by the Florentines between 1591 and 1598, meant that the loopholes had to be raised.
"Everything is badly done and very poorly built [...]" complained Vauban. The cannon slits in the enclosure wall, built sixty years after the castle, most probably by the Florentines between 1591 and 1598, had to be raised.

15 The Florentine door, above the entrance, leads to the wall walk. On the landing stage, the first signs of the raising work by Raymond de Bonnefons, Henry IV's engineer, in around 1600, can be clearly seen. Beneath the pink limestone listel - a horizontal moulding - there are the remains of the bases of 'chevaux de frise': these horizontal stakes prevented climbing and the placing of ladders against the curtain wall.

16 The western enclosure is characterised by Vauban's artillery parapet (1701), a second raising of the wall made of stone merlons filled with bricks.

17 Three bases of German flaks from the Second World War, designed for air raid defence and flanked by blockhouses, are still visible on the south side.

A State prison

Prison conditions

The insular location and architecture of the chateau made escape impossible. Cramped living conditions and a lack of hygiene left little chance of survival. However, certain prisoners paid one pistole* per day to rent a private room. Thus Mirabeau, a member of the future Revolutionary Tribunat, was imprisoned at If by lettre de cachet* at the request of his father, to punish him for his libertine leanings. Here, he wrote his *Essay on despotism* and seduced the quartermistress. The "pistole*" rent system continued into the 19th century.

Political prisoners

In 1580, the knight Anselme, accused of plotting against the monarchy, was one of the first prisoners to be incarcerated. After the promulgation of the Edict of Fontainebleau* in 1685, Protestants were imprisoned here.
In the space of two centuries, 3,500 Protestants were crammed in, some dying here, others ending up in chains on the galleys of Marseille.
Opponents of the regime were also imprisoned at If. There are inscriptions in the courtyard made by revolutionaries of 1848. Their quality indicates the presence of professional stonemasons, acting under the control of the garrison. In 1852, 304 Republicans, opponents of Napoleon III, waited here to be deported to labour camp. In 1871, it was the turn of insurgents from the Marseille uprising. The last prisoners were Germans, during the First World War.

* *Explanations overleaf.*